



## ARTICLE

# Religion in Public Life: Rethinking the Visibility and Role of Religion as an Ethical Resource in the Transformation of the Higher Education Landscape in Post-1990 Zambia

*Nelly Mwale & Melvin Simuchimba*

University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia

### ABSTRACT

This article revisits the relationship between religion and education in post-1990 to understand the growing public role of religion in higher education in Zambia. The aim of the study that informs the article was to understand the public role of religion through the example of Catholicism in university education provision in Zambia. Informed by interpretivism and interpretive phenomenology, data were gathered through interviews with purposively chosen Catholic Church, Catholic university education representatives, and document analysis, and reductively explicated. Largely in conversation with the discourses of religious resources, the article demonstrates that the growing visibility of the Catholic Church on the Zambian university education landscape after the 1990s was driven by the quest to serve the needs of the Church, the principles of Catholic education and the society, thereby contributing to the transformation of the higher education landscape. The article argues that contrary to projections that secularisation would lead to a decline of religion in public life, religion had remained a useful ethical resource for the transformation of university education provision in post-1990 Zambia underpinned by an ethical concern to promote social and individual wellbeing and support the state's expansion of higher education.

### KEYWORDS

religion, public life, ethical resource, Catholic university education, Zambian private higher education

---

## Introduction

This article revisits the relationship between religion and education using the example of the Catholic Church's recent engagement in university education provision to understand the growing public role of religion in post-1990 Zambia. It argues that contrary to projections that secularisation would lead to a decline in religion in public life, the visibility of religion on the university landscape signified that religion had remained a useful resource for the transformation of university education provision underpinned by an ethical concern to promote social and individual well-being, and support the state's expansion of higher education. The article was ignited by discourses of secularisation in Africa on the one hand, and the growth of religion affiliated universities on the other. Samarin (1966) acknowledged the observation by some sociologists that Africa would become increasingly secular. Unlike in Western Europe, secularisation was accompanied not by a decline in religious devotion but by a dramatic rise in South Africa (Elphick, 1997, pp. 1–15). In Zambia, the brisk growth of religion-affiliated higher education after the 1990s pointed to religion's growing presence in public life. As confirmed by Carpenter (2017), religion's boom in the public sphere was exemplified among other ways the growth of Church involvement in university education through the birth of Christian universities often attributed to the rapid rise of Christian adherence and the volatile growth of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite the visibility of religion in public life and in particular, higher education through the surge in Christian universities, and amid the many recent acknowledgments of the global growth of both Christianity and higher education (Glanzer, Carpenter, & Lantinga, 2011; Carpenter, 2017), there has been little scholarly engagement with the phenomenon in Zambia. Unlike in other African contexts such as Nigeria and South Africa where the engagement of the Christian churches in higher education had been analysed (Enegho, 2017; Diedericks 2019), Zambian scholarship has neglected religion in higher education because of the preoccupation with the primary and secondary levels of education (Hambulo, 2016; Simuchimba, 2005; Carmody, 2007/2011). As advanced by Levy (2009), the private higher education system had not been a static entity but instead had changed and evolved over many years in response to social, economic and political change; hence deserved sustained critical investigation. This article accounts for the growing visibility of religion on the university education landscape in Zambia.

Given the numerous typologies of private higher education and Christian higher education, the article focuses on Catholic university education for purposes of exemplifying religions' engagement in university education. The interest in the Catholic Church was sparked off by the 125 years of Catholicism celebrations in 2016 (QFM News, 2017) and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in university education in 2018. This was not only a time for institutional reflections, but also one that ignited a scholarly inquiry into the lived experiences of the Catholic Church. By so doing, the article does not suggest that the Catholic Church was the only Church in university education provision as the Protestant churches were also involved

in higher education. Instead, the article exemplifies how religion had shaped the university education landscape for purposes of making a modest contribution to discourses of religion in public life and documenting this new development for posterity. The insights in the article are also not for purposes of generalisation, but for providing a window, through which religion's visibility in public life could be understood in post-1990 Zambia.

The article compliments and extends Levy's (2017) conclusions that universities sponsored by Christian churches were a neglected but important part of private higher education everywhere by filling a contextual gap from the Zambian context and demonstrating the visible role of Christian universities underpinned by an ethical concern to transform the university education landscape. The article further compliments Mwale's (2017) portrayal of Catholic university education in the media in Zambia from an empirical perspective by unveiling the lived experiences of the Church in university education provision.

This article concentrates on post-1990s when higher education was liberalised. Indirectly, this was when the country was declared a Christian nation with the possibility of creating another kind of clientele in search of Christian oriented university education. These decisions were informed by Carpenter's (2017) observation that Christian higher education exists at the intersection of two of the most dynamic social trends in Africa, the rapid rise of Christianity, and volatile growth of higher education especially emerging around the 1990s (a period associated with a surge in Christianity and crisis in African universities). The article proceeds by situating religion in public life through its visibility in higher education in an analytical framework and a context. Thereafter, the methods that informed the article are highlighted before accounting for religion's presence on the university education landscape through the use of religion as an ethical resource.

## Analytical Framework

Broadly informed by Derrick Layder's adaptive theory (1998) that allowed for learning from existing theories and generating insights from the emerging field data, the article is largely in conversation with Benne's (2001) framework of determining the category of an institution by examining eight aspects of its life. These include the public relevance of its Christian vision, public rhetoric, membership requirements, the role of the religion or theology department, and whether any such courses are required, the nature and frequency of chapel, the overall ethos, the degree of support by the sponsoring Church, and the role of the associated Church in matters of governance (Benne, 2001). A Catholic university was understood as one that acknowledged and embraced a [Catholic] confessional identity in the mission statements and altered aspects of its policies, governance, curriculum and ethos in light of its Christian [Catholic] identity (Schroeder, 2002, p. 9). Benne's categories helped to identify what constitutes a Christian university, and understand how the example of the Catholic Church's engagement in university education had contributed to the transformation of the university education landscape through the interaction of religion and education in the sector.

The article also draws on discourses of religious resources by Ter Haar and Ellis (2006). These include religious ideas (what people actually believe), religious practices, religious organisation (how religious communities are formed and function), and religious (or spiritual) experiences (such as the subjective experience of inner change or transformation) (Ter Haar, 2005, pp. 22–27). These components resonate with Ninian Smart's dimensions of religion (Smart, 1969), which include the practical or ritual, the experiential or emotional, the narrative or mythic, the doctrinal or philosophical, the ethical or legal, the social or institutional and the material. While Benne's framework will be used to understand the identity and general roles of religion in higher education, the discourses of religious resource will be used to explain the growing visibility of the Church in the sector. Though largely framing the study around these discourses, the limitations of using a specific framework in a study are acknowledged. Hence, the article only presents one of the many truths (Francis, 2001) on the growing visibility of religion's presence in higher education in post-1990 Zambia.

### Contextualising the Setting

The article situates religion's role in public life as exemplified in the Church's engagement in higher education in the context of policies, the relationship between religion and education prior to the 1990s and the onset of Catholic engagement in university education. Before independence, there were neither public nor private universities in Zambia. The changes in legislation in the 1990s created a new platform for university education as private providers were encouraged to come on board through the *Educating our Future* policy document (Ministry of Education, 1996). Under this liberalised educational system, the right of private organisations, individuals, religious bodies, and local communities to establish and control their own educational institutions was recognised and welcomed (Ministry of Education, 1996).

University education in Zambia is also guided by other policy documents such as *Vision 2030*. *Vision 2030* (2006–2030) is Zambia's first ever long-term plan expressing the country's aspirations of being a prosperous middle-income country by the year 2030. The policy document embodies values of socio-economic justice underpinned by the principles of gender responsive sustainable development, democracy, respect for human rights, traditional and family values, positive attitude towards work, peaceful co-existence, and private-public partnerships (GRZ, 2006, p. 7). It identifies education as a critical component in enhancing the country's socio-economic development, and acknowledges that the country has yet to reach educational standards that are commensurate with sustainable development and promotes public-private partnerships in the sector (GRZ, 2006, p. 33).

The *Vision 2030* was operationalised through the implementation of five national development plans beginning with the Fifth National Development Plan (2006–2010), and the Sixth National development plan (2011–2015) that was revised to cover the period 2013–2016. The current national plan is the Seventh National Development Plan (2017–2021). Its focus in higher education is to increase access to university

education and technical education, vocational and entrepreneurship training (TEVET), enhancing the quality of training and increasing its relevance to the needs of the industry (GRZ, 2017).

Based on *Vision 2030* and the national development plans, higher education was legislated through the Higher Education Act (2013), which until 2013 was the University Act of 1999. Apart from establishing the Higher Education Authority (HEA) that regulates university education, the Act also spells out the procedures and regulations of private higher education institutions and highlights the functions of providers of higher education (Higher Education Act, 2013, pp. 106–107).

Catholic provision of university education was also illuminated by Catholic principles on education enshrined in the Catholic policy documents such as the 1965 *Gravissimum Educationis* (Pope P. VI, 1965). The *Gravissimum Educationis* was the second Vatican Council declaration on Christian education. Among its principles is that everyone has an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, ability, sex, and the culture and tradition of their country. The purpose of education remains the harmonious development of the student's physical, moral and intellectual endowments, the promotion of the common good and motivation to appraise moral values with a right conscience. The declaration emphasises the additional right for all Christians to a truly Christian education, and the Church's obligation to make moral and religious education available in all schools. Additionally, the policy recognises that the Church and her schools depend on teachers for the accomplishment of their goals hence calls for special traits of the teachers.

The other Church policy document that guides Catholic university education is the 1990 *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. It is an apostolic constitution on Catholic higher education that provides an overview for Catholic universities. It was intended to define and refine the Catholicism of Catholic institutions of higher education (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1990). The document identifies what constitutes Catholic identity at Catholic colleges and universities and specifies general norms to achieve a Catholic mission. These norms include being a community of scholars representing various branches of human knowledge and dedicated to research, teaching and service in accordance with its cultural mission. Others are informing and carrying out research, teaching and other activities with Catholic ideals, principles and attitudes, making known the Catholic identity, influencing all university activities with Catholic teaching and discipline, fully respecting the freedom of conscience of each person and possessing the autonomy necessary to develop a distinctive identity and purpose (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1990). The aspirations of *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) and *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990) were celebrated during the 2015 World Congress on Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014) that gave new stimulus to the Church's involvement in the field of education.

### **The Onset of Catholic Presence in University Education in Zambia**

When Zambia gained independence in 1964, there were few university graduates and no public or private universities. Higher education was the responsibility of the

government of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Those who qualified to enter university went to the university college of Rhodesia and Nyasaland of 1955 in Salisbury while others went to South and East Africa (Kelly, 2006). This changed after independence when the country's first public university – the University of Zambia – was established in 1966, followed by Copperbelt in 1987 and others.

Prior to the 1990s, university education provision remained the state's responsibility through the two public universities. The Church was only involved in university education through its Catholic representation (the clergy and lay persons) based on their expertise in different fields. In addition to this, the Catholic missionaries shaped the Zambian education system through the provision of education at the lower levels, including the running of colleges of education and skills training centres in the country. Their engagement also included participation in the formulation of policies, sponsoring staff development to teach Religious Education (RE) in public higher education and the provision of teaching and learning materials among other ways (Carmody, 2004). For example, Thomas McGivern was the Inspector of RE at the Ministry of Education who shaped policies on RE and produced teaching and learning materials for the subject (Mwale and Chita, 2017, pp. 10–11).

After the 1990s, the Church vividly appeared on the scene of university education when in the quest to increase access to university education and amid inadequate funding to higher education, the government of the Republic of Zambia encouraged the establishment and accreditation of private universities (Kelly, 1991). As of 2018, the Catholic Church had four institutions that were registered and accredited with the Ministry of Higher Education and the HEA (St. Dominic's Major Seminary, DMI St. Eugene University, St. Bonaventure and Zambia Catholic University [ZCU]). Named after Saint Eugene De Mazenod, the founder of Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), DMI St. Eugene University is run by the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. The Franciscans run St. Bonaventure University College. Unlike these two universities associated with the Catholic Church and run by religious congregations, ZCU was owned by the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB) and opened in April 2008. Despite the growth of Catholic higher education in Zambia, the Catholic clergy and laypersons have continued to contribute to Zambian higher education through their presence in the public higher education, including the chaplaincy service that has been provided since the early years of the establishment of public universities.

With regards to the relationship between religion and education in private universities in Zambia, it must be noted that differences abound with public universities. Given that the country has no policy on religion in education except as provided for in the country's Constitution and state policies, university education provision by the Church aligns with state policies. For example, the Catholic education system is open to people of other faiths and the religious freedoms of others are guaranteed especially since Zambia remained a multifaith society despite being declared Christian nation. At the same time, the Christian universities were at liberty to embrace their denominational ethos in education.

---

## Method

The article is informed by insights from an interpretive phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990; Padilla-Díaz, 2015), in which the unit of analysis was purposively chosen based on its relevance to the study (Mason, 2002). The study aimed to provide an in-depth self-understanding on the growth of Catholic university education by exploring the experiences of the Catholic Church in university education provision. Aware of the numerous Christian churches in university education provision, one Church (the Catholic Church) was chosen for purposes of depth and most importantly, because it was among the earliest churches to venture into the provision of education. The Catholic Church was also among the influential churches in social service provision and a recognised State partner in education (Gibbs & Ajulu, 1999; Impact Correspondent, 2017). The Catholic Church was therefore chosen based on its typicality or possession of particular characteristics being sought (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The decision was also informed by Creswell's (2007) advice that the more diverse the experiences of participants are, the harder it becomes to find the underlying essence and common meanings attributed to the studied phenomenon.

Of the Catholic higher education institutions, the study focused on ZCU because unlike other institutions, it did not belong to any particular Catholic congregation or religious order but instead was operated by Catholic bishops and owned by all Catholics. The study drew on recorded interviews with purposively chosen Church and Catholic university education representatives herein identified with letters of the alphabet (Strauss et. al., 1998), and document analysis. The decision was guided by Creswell (2007) and Van Manen (1990) on the numerous evidentiary sources in phenomenological studies such as interviews, documentation, and observations. Based on Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals in phenomenological research, eight (8) participants from the Catholic Church (ZCCB) education department and ZCU were included in the study for face-to-face interviews. These included the ZCCB education department representative (1), the ZCU management representatives (2), longest serving lecturers at ZCU (2), and student representatives (3). The interviews were conducted at two sites (ZCCB in Lusaka and ZCU in Kalulushi, on the Copperbelt) over a period of three months in 2018 (August, September, October). The last interviews were conducted between May and June in 2019. The ZCCB Education department was targeted because it acts as liaison between the Ministry of Higher Education and Catholic educational facilities, represents the ZCCB on all educational fora, promotes Catholic ethos in the learning institutions, and coordinates the Church's commitment to providing quality education based on Gospel values (ZCCB, 2016).

Additional sources of data were observations of selected functions and document analysis. In this regard, some Church functions related to university education such as graduation ceremonies were attended, in particular, the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations and 7<sup>th</sup> graduation ceremony at ZCU in Kalulushi in September 2018. The fundraising functions in the public media were analysed for themes related to the



study. The study was also informed by document analysis, which was chosen on the basis of availability. The documents included archival materials in the ZCCB archives such as annual reports, conference minutes, strategic plans, Catholic university brochures, and newspaper articles among others. The guidelines by Scott (1990) on quality control, formulated for handling documentary sources (authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning) also informed the use of documents.

Data were inductively analysed through the description of the phenomenon and significant statements, horizontalisation and the development of clusters of meaning through textural and structural descriptions of Catholic university education (Creswell, 2007). This involved the generation and application of codes to the data and the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns. This was done while keeping in check Benne and Ter Haar's frameworks on what constitutes a Christian university and the religious resource that could produce knowledge for developmental purposes respectively.

In addition, ethical considerations were taken into account. For example, approval and ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Zambia (the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee). Permission from the ZCCB and ZCU was also sought for purposes of gaining access to their institutions and conducting the study. The interview processes also started with obtaining participants' permission to participate in the study. Suffice to note that ethical issues around privacy, informed consent, anonymity, secrecy being truthful and the desirability of the research issues (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006, p. 158) were adhered to.

### **Accounting for the Visibility of the Catholic Church in Public Life through University Education Provision in Zambia**

Despite the policies on liberalisation in the 1990s created an enabling environment for the Catholic Church to establish their own universities, the Church's visibility in public life was driven by their own reasons for the engagement in university education provision. To start with, the intent of the Catholic Church was to widen access to university education because Zambia's public universities were unable to absorb the population seeking higher education. This high demand for higher education was partly triggered by the expansion of primary and secondary education, leading to the increase in the number of qualified secondary school graduates seeking tertiary education (Masaiti & Mwale, 2017). For instance, only 8 percent of school leavers accessed public universities in Zambia (GRZ, 2013) while the projections in 2018 were put at 10 percent (Masaiti [Personal communication], 2018). This meant that only about a quarter of the applicants to higher institutions were admitted each year, leading to a high demand for admission in the private institutions.

The Church thus began to offer the third level of education because of the growing number of secondary school leavers in need of this university education (Participant K).



In 2011, Vatican Radio also reported that the Zambian bishops had responded to the need to provide tertiary education to the ever-growing number of school leavers in the country by establishing the Catholic university in 2008. The widening of access to university education was also with a special focus on those from vulnerable backgrounds. This was confirmed and stressed by a participant who observed that

the situation that was obtaining was that after people completed secondary level of education, many vulnerable and poor people would not afford to go into third level of education because of the costs involved [...] the Church, being on the side of the poor, introduced university education to empower the poor and vulnerable (Participant J).

The Church wanted to supplement state facilities and programmes in university education by way of producing trained and formed personnel who would devote their time and energy to the study and solving of the social questions for the integral development of the country (Chilambwe, 2018). Although Catholic university education was established to widen access to university education, Church affiliated universities could only accommodate a small number of the students who qualified for tertiary education in their institutions (Hittenberger, 2004). Nonetheless, the vision and aspirations of the Church in the sector signified the quest to serve the needs of society by collaborating with the State to expand the university education sector, thereby demonstrating that religion could be a resource in higher education.

The Church's visibility in higher education was also driven by the quest to serve the ideals of Catholic principles in education by offering her own nature of university education that was at the same time in tune with state policies in higher education. For example, the ZCU and its programmes were accredited to the HEA. An important characteristic of Catholic university education was quality holistic university education that emphasised moral formation. For example, Catholic education was grounded in the integral development of the human person in accordance with the Gospel values (Calareso, Cesareo, & McFarland, 2011). The specific purpose was the formation of boys and girls, men and women who would be good (religious) citizens of the world. Therefore, the Catholic Church became involved in university education provision to impart morals and values to students.

The Church views the admitted students not only as individuals searching for knowledge and skills but also as ambassadors in ethical values who could provide a service to the society at large (Participant L).

The Church got involved in university education provision to ripen capacity for right judgement, introduce the students to the culture heritage of past generations, promote a sense of value, and prepare students for professional life in a spirit of service (Chilambwe, 2018). As argued by Theron (2013), Christian higher education could contribute to the general acquisition of knowledge, and the moral formation of students in particular. The emphasis on quality holistic education that encompassed

moral formation further resonates with Benne's (2001) argument on the public relevance of the Christian vision in which the mission of education remained tailored to the mission of the Church.

The Catholic Church also became visible in university education to incorporate a spiritual ethos in the life of university education. This was contrary to the post-1990 university education landscape in which religion only remained as a subject to be taught to students being prepared to teach RE in schools. The spiritual ethos was driven by aspirations to produce a particular citizenry as manifested in the institutional mottos such as "the truth shall set you free". This was translated into providing an atmosphere not only tailored to academics but also exposing students to what life was all about (through experiences meant to help students develop into complete human beings – academically, spiritually, socially, and physically). These efforts included spiritual services and worship opportunities, sports activities, prayer meetings, campus clubs, and recreational activities among others. These activities shaped the relationship between religion and education through the emphasis on holistic university education that was not prominent in public university education.

Furthermore, the chaplaincy in Christian universities remains a key element (Benne, 2001). For example, the office of the university chaplain coordinated and superintended over all spiritual related activities, including consultation and counseling at ZCU. Spiritual gatherings such as the Catholic Student Community (CASC), and the Youth Forum were also popular. The Catholic ethos was among other ways promoted by the weekly spiritual activities, such as the celebration of mass every Sunday and Wednesday in the university chapel, and the monthly spiritual exercises, such as the days of recollection once in a month in which students and members of staff were accorded an opportunity to reflect on improve through self-retrospection and prayer. The overall organisation or structure of Catholic university education reflected through the support of the Church through the bishops and their role in governance cemented the public role of the Church in university education. As Calasero et al. (2011) pointed out, the Catholic University seeks to develop the whole person, emphasising the moral, religious, social, as well as the intellectual, in an integrated fashion that helps students discover and develop fully their human dignity and potential.

The Catholic Church's engagement in public life was further motivated by the desire to offer education that fostered excellence, service, and integrity by emphasising service at different levels. Service was tied to providing the Church with an opportunity to be of service in the provision of an integrated, holistic, and quality education at the university level. Service was also related to providing students with a chance to study in a Catholic environment, in which the acquisition of advanced skills, ethical, moral, and spiritual formation was stressed (Chilambwe, 2018), as well as service to society as a whole. According to the *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (1990), service was linked to the Church and society, pastoral ministry, cultural dialogue, and evangelisation.

The understanding of service further called on students and teaching staff alike to learn to be attentive to the poorest and those who suffer economic, social, cultural or religious injustice, "the option for the poor" (Komakoma, 2003). This entailed working towards bridging the gap between the rich and poor by making it possible

for students from poor backgrounds to access and complete university education, including the adult literacy programmes that targeted women. For instance, the adult literacy programme aimed to empower women especially those disadvantaged owing to certain cultural practices such as early marriages and teenage pregnancies (ZCU, 2018). These reasons underlined the ethical concern of the Church in which preference was given to the poor in the hope of addressing equality. Therefore, religion and education interacted closely on the university education landscape as opposed to a diminished relationship attributed to secularisation.

The Church was also concerned with future leadership to serve both societal and Church needs. The Church sees the establishment of the university as a means of preparing future leaders in Zambia. This was to be through developing morals and principles of leadership qualities in the upcoming generations for the service and development of the country as there is no true development of a nation without an authentic, moral, and principled leadership and knowledge for its own sake is nothing unless it is put at the service of the nation (Chelambwe, 2018). As Carpenter (2017, p. 26) notes, “Church people start these universities so their own youth can flourish, but the institutions also aim to build up a nation”. To produce leadership with an ethical concern, courses like Ethics and Catholic Social Teachings taught to all students, confirm the place of religion courses in a Christian university (Schroeder, 2002, p. 23). As argued by Nguru (2008), the Church’s offering of her own distinct education was linked to advancing roles related to helping a student to become a certain kind of person and do certain kinds of things by integrating a student’s faith and education to produce a student who is competent in his or her profession, and also committed to apply his or her competency to address the spiritual and material conditions of the African continent and the world.

Seen through the prism of Benne’s framework, the Catholic Church’s engagement in university education provision renewed the religion and education interface at the university level by way of being an extension of the Catholic education system and identity.

Catholic universities are critical tools in evangelization [...]. We do not only focus on training would be professionals but we also teach social teachings of the Church so that Christ is communicated to change the world for better. We also focus on spiritual growth of our students so that they are helpful to society in future (Chilambwe, 2016).

As concluded by Altbach (2005), Catholic institutions globally had a tradition to serve the Church. Chivore (2006) also points out that the Church’s quest to foster denominational convictions at university level through formal academic education remained prominent, implying a confessional kind of education. This signified that contrary to Burtchaell’s (1998) observations in the United States of America in which Christian higher education was hardly Christian at all owing to the disengagement of colleges and universities from their sponsoring Christian churches or denominations that led to a diminishing role of education as a missionary activity, the understanding

of the role of the Catholic university signified that universities were still extensions of the work of the Church.

In addition, the engagement of the Church in university education provision had contributed to the transformation of the university education landscape by adding the religion affiliated higher education category to the Zambian context. This revived the relationship between religion and education at the university level. For example, higher education became to be identified with institutions underpinned by religious identities marked by Benne's (2001) attributes of a Christian university such as Christian vision, the role of the religion or theology department, and whether any such courses are required as reflected through the foundational courses such as Ethics and Social Teachings of the Church, philosophy and Religion Studies. Similarly, the nature and frequency of chapel and the overall ethos manifested the place of chaplaincy, religious activities and Catholic identity in the institution. This demonstrated that contrary to the projections on the diminishing place of religion in higher education or the dying of the religious light in the academy in the words of Burtchaeil (1998), the growth of Christian universities as exemplified by Catholic university education had renewed the role of religion in public life.

### **Religion as an Ethical Resource in the Transformation of Higher Education in Zambia**

Most of the reasons accounting for the more visible role of religion in public life through the Church's engagement in university education provision resonates with how religion is a resource that underpins notions of development (Ter Haar and Ellis, 2006). The visibility of the Catholic Church in public life is firstly facilitated by the Catholic teachings that constitute the religious ideas (Ter Haar, 2005). These included the religious ideas of spreading the faith through education in response to the Gospel of Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation". The Catholic Church was thus inspired by the Great Command in Mark 16:15 (Chilambwe, 2018). Apart from the Biblical command, the Church philosophies on integrated, holistic, and quality education enshrined in their doctrines further drove the engagement and consequent transformation of the higher education landscape through the emphasis to produce a particular kind of citizenry.

Catholic university education believed in providing a study environment that stressed the acquisition of advanced skills, ethical, moral, and spiritual formation. These teachings were backed by the provisions in the Church policy documents such as the 1965 Declaration on Christian Education, and the *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990). For example, the Church teaches that education is a universal human right and as such, true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his or her ultimate end and of the good of the society, of which he or she is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he or she will share what has been imparted in him/her (Pope P. VI, 1965). While this points to how the Church draws on secular discourses of human rights to support her mission in university education provision, this stance also resonates with the Church's stance on human dignity. Hence, investing in higher

education provided another avenue to advance the internal renewal of the Church, preserve and enhance its beneficent influence upon the world, especially the intellectual world (Pope P. VI, 1965). By cooperating with the state to expand higher education, the teachings of the Church became an ethical resource by way of forming a basis for doing what was considered to be morally right through engagement in university education provision.

In addition, the practices of the Church especially in living the social gospel and serving the needs of the poor inspired the Church's engagement in contributing towards the transformation of the university education landscape through the promotion of socio-economic development of the country. These aspirations were linked to the practice of responding to the needs of society that disrupted the well-being of humanity as informed by Church's social teachings. This underpinned what the Church perceived as the ethical duty to society. The Church's resolve to widen access; foster equity and play out its prophetic role could not be detached from the Church's practice of being on the side of the needy, and a moral compass (Lemmons, 2008). For example, the principles of the Catholic social teachings of solidarity that recognises that all people and social groups are united evoked the classical notion of virtue ethics, in which individuals seek to contribute their part to the creation of a moral community, and to cultivate strength of character to donate to the common good of an expanding community (MacIntyre, 2007). This entailed that the Church was tapping into her ethical resource in collaborating with the state in the expansion of university education by being in solidarity with the needy.

The structures of the Church also facilitated the involvement of the Church in the transformation of university education landscape because while the universities were open to people from different religious orientations, the immediate pool or clientele was the Church membership itself. This resonates with Benne's (2001, p. 187) strategies for keeping the faith in Christian educational institutions such as the availability of the critical mass of faculty, administrators, board members, and students who identify strongly with the institutions' mission with the ability to articulate the vision and provide leadership. It was also through the organisational structures of the Church (ZCCB) that ZCU had been established. These actions were underpinned by the religious ethical duty to provide education. As stipulated in the Declaration on Christian Education (Pope P. VI, 1965), the duty of educating belongs to the Church, not merely because she must be recognised as a human society capable of educating, but especially because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to humanity to build a good earthly society and a world that is more human.

The experiences of the Church gained over time also gave the Catholic Church the reputation in the university education sector. The Catholic Church in Zambia was recognised as a partner in social services provision, hence hoped to use the experiences gained at the lower levels to provide quality university education since 1895 (Mwale & Simuchimba, 2018). One participant noted that

the Church has invested a lot in primary and secondary education and a lot of people appreciate Catholic education [...], a lot of people value education offered

---

by the Catholic Church [...] some of them [people] will openly say, “I want my child to go to a Catholic school” (Participant J).

The then Catholic University Chancellor Archbishop Ignatius Chama also noted that the Church through the experience gained at providing education at primary and secondary level was responsible for the confidence it had to provide higher education (Muvi TV News, 2015).

The student participants in the study also confirmed the trust and parents' preference to Catholic education when recounting why they had chosen Catholic university education. They pointed to their parents' desire for them to have a Catholic education despite being non-Catholics (Participant N, O, and P). Hence, with experiences gained as provider of education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and as a partner in catering for the broader contemporary social needs in the country (Chilambwe, 2018), the Catholic Church became a valuable resource in the state's efforts to provide more access to quality university education.

## Conclusion

The article explored the visibility of religion in higher education through the engagement of the Catholic Church in university education provision in post-1990 Zambia. As a new development on the higher education landscape, the article demonstrated that the Church was contributing to the transformation of the higher education landscape through the renewed interaction between religion and education exemplified in the quest to widen access, opt for the poor, offer holistic and humanised education, and promote integral development to serve the needs of society, the Church and Catholic principles on education. The article revealed that the engagement of the Church in university education provision was driven by upholding the attributes of Benne's categories of what constituted a Christian university. It also demonstrated that religion, more specifically Catholicism, remained an ethical resource for collaborating with the State in the expansion of higher education. Based on this, the article has argued that contrary to the widely held projections that religion would diminish, the growth of the Zambian Catholic education system through university education provision demonstrated the growing visibility of religion in public life in post-1990 Zambia.

The growing visibility of religion on the university education landscape through the example of the Catholic Church was anchored on the quest to serve the needs of the Church, the principles of Catholic education and the society, thereby contributing to the transformation of the higher education landscape. As such, the article demonstrated that the Church's transformation of the university education landscape could be attributed to the strides to remain relevant through an ethical concern and the state's inability to meet the growing demand for higher education in the country. The article therefore consolidates emerging scholarship on religion in public life exemplified through Christian universities in Zambia by showing that despite being a neglected aspect, religion remained a significant facet of the higher education landscape.

## References

- Altbach, P. G. (2005). The Private Higher Education Revolution: An Introduction. In P. G. Altbach (Ed.), *Private Higher Education* (pp. 1–9). Sense Publishers.
- Benne, R. (2001). *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities keep Faith with their Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.
- Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (2006). *How to Research*. New York: Open University Press.
- Burtchaell, J. T. (1998). *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.
- Calareso, J. P., Cesareo, F., & McFarland, M. C. (2011, April 7). Vision for Catholic Education: As I see it. *The Telegram*.
- Carmody, B. P. (2004). *Religion and Education in Zambia*. Ndola: Mission Press.
- Carmody, B. P. (2007). Catholic Church and State Relations in Zambian Education: A Contemporary Analysis. In G. Grace & O’Keefe (Eds.), *International Handbook of Catholic Education. International Handbooks of Religion and Education*, (Vol. 2, pp. 543–562). Dordrecht: Springer. DOI: [10.1007/978-1-4020-5776-2\\_28](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5776-2_28)
- Carmody, B. P. (2011). Towards a Contemporary Catholic Philosophy of Education. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 3(2), 106–119. DOI: [10.1080/19422539.2011.600279](https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2011.600279)
- Carpenter, J. (2017, July 10). The Rise of Private Universities in Africa is Being Dominated by Christian Schools. *Quartz*.
- Carpenter, J. (2017). Christian Universities Grow in Africa. *International Higher Education*, 88, 25–26. DOI: [10.6017/ihe.2017.88.9692](https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2017.88.9692)
- Chilambwe, P. (2016, September 2). Catholic Universities are Tools of Evangelisation – ZCU Vice Chancellor Says. *Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa News*.
- Chilambwe, P. (2018, September 15). *ZCU 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Speech*. Zambia Catholic University, Kalulushi.
- Chivore, B. R. S. (2006). Private Higher Education in Zimbabwe. In N. V. Varghese (Ed.), *Growth and Expansion of Private Higher Education in Africa*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Congregation for Catholic Education (2014). *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* [Instrumentum Laboris]. Retrieved from [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_20140407\\_educare-oggi-e-domani\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20140407_educare-oggi-e-domani_en.html)



---

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. London: Sage Publications.

Diedericks, M. (2019). The Idea of a “Profit-Profit” Private Christian University in South Africa. *KOERS-Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 84(1), 1–14.

Ex Corde Ecclesiae. (1990). *Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic Universities*. Vatican.

Elphick, R. (1997). Introduction: Christianity in South African History. In R. Elphick & R. Davenport (Eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: Political, Social and Cultural History*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Enegho, F. E. (2017). Is Our Well Poisoned? A Historical/Economic Analysis of Christian Higher Education in Nigeria. *Missionalia*, 45(3), 236–249. DOI: [10.7832/45-3-191](https://doi.org/10.7832/45-3-191)

Francis, B. (2001). Commonality and Difference? Attempts to Escape from Theoretical Dualisms in Emancipatory Research in Education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11(2), 157–172. DOI: [10.1080/09620210100200071](https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210100200071)

Glanzer, P. L., Carpenter, J. A., & Lantinga, N. (2011). Looking for God in the University: Examining Trends in Global Christian Higher Education. *Higher Education*, 61(6), 721–755. DOI: [10.1007/s10734-010-9359-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9359-x)

Gibbs, S., & Ajulu, D. (1999). *The Role of the Church in Advocacy: Case Studies from Southern and Eastern Africa*. Oxford: INTRAC.

Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ). (2006). *Vision 2030*. GRZ: Lusaka.

Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ). (2013). *Revised Sixth National Development Plan 2013–2016*. GRZ: Lusaka.

Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ). (2017). *Seventh National Development Plan 2017–2021*. GRZ: Lusaka.

Hambulo, F. M. (2016). *Catholic Secondary Education and Identity Reformation in Zambia's Southern Province*. [PhD Thesis]. University of South Africa.

*Higher Education Act*, No. 4 (2013). GRZ: Lusaka.

Hittenberger, J. S. (2004). Globalization, “Marketization”, and the Mission of Pentecostal Higher Education in Africa. *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 26 (2), 182–215. DOI: [10.1163/157007404776111018](https://doi.org/10.1163/157007404776111018)

Impact Correspondent. (2017). 125 Years of Catholicism in Zambia: A Need for New Evangelisation. *Impact Magazine*, p. 5.

Kelly, M. J. (1991). *Education in a Declining Economy: The Case of Zambia: 1975–1985* [EDI Development Policy Case Series. Analytical Case Studies Number 8]. Washington, DC 20433: World Bank.

Kelly, M. J. (2006). *The Origins and Development of Education in Zambia*. Lusaka: Bookworld Publishers.

Komakoma, J. (2003). *The Social Teaching of the Catholic Bishops and Other Christian Leaders in Zambia: Major Pastoral Letters and Statements 1953–2001*. Ndola: Mission Press.

Layder, D. (1998). *Sociological Practice: Linking Theory and Social Research*. London: Sage.

Lemmons, E. A. (2008). What's so Catholic about the Catholic College: How Catholic Universities and Colleges Can Maintain a Healthy Sense of their Catholic Identity. *The Catholic Spirit. The Newspaper of the Archdioceses of St. Paul and Minneapolis*.

Levy, D. (2009). Growth and Typology. In S. Bjarnason, K. M. Cheng, J. Fielden, M. J. Lemaire, D. Levy & N. V. Varghese (Eds.), *A New Dynamic: Private Higher Education* (pp. 1–22). France: United Nations Educational.

Levy, D. (2017). Christian Higher Education's Place within Private Higher Education. *International Higher Education*, 88, 22–23.

MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Masaiti, G., & Mwale, N. (2017). University of Zambia: Contextualization and Contribution to Flagship Status in Zambia. In D. Teffera (Ed.), *Flagship Universities in Africa* (pp. 467–505). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage.

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Educating Our Future: National Policy on Education*. Lusaka: ZEPH.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Muvi TV News. (2015, October 15, 5:10 pm). *State Commends Catholic Church*. CAT.

Mwale, N., & Chita, J. (2017). Trailing a Missionary Teacher's Position and Contributions in Zambian Religious Education. *Religion and Education*, 44(1), 22–38. DOI: [10.1080/15507394.2016.1271221](https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2016.1271221)

Mwale, N. (2017). Portrayal of Catholic University Education in the Media: Purpose and Contributions to Education in the Twenty-First Century Zambia. *International Journal of Catholic Catholicism*, 9(1), 52–65.

Mwale, N., & Simuchimba, M. (2018). 125 Years of Catholicism in Zambia: the History and Mission of the Church in the Provision of University Education. *Oral History Journal of South Africa*, 6(1), 1–16.

Nguru, F. W. (2008). What can Christian Higher Education do to Promote Educational Well-Being in Africa? In N. Lantinga (Ed.), *Christian Higher Education in the Global Context: Implications for Curriculum, Pedagogy and Administration* (pp. 135–149). Sioux Centre: Dordt College Press.

---

Padilla-Díaz, M. (2015). Phenomenology in Educational Qualitative Research: Philosophy as Science or Philosophical Science. *International Journal of Educational Excellence*, 1(2), 101–110.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological Research Methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.). *Existential Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology* (pp. 41–60). New York: Plenum.

Pope P. VI. (1965). *Declaration on Christian Education: (Gravissimum Educationis)*. St. Paul Editions.

QFM News. (2017, July 15). Catholics Celebrate 125 Years of Existence in Zambia. *QFM News*.

Samarin, W. J. (1966). Religion and Modernisation in Africa. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 39(4), 288–297.

Schroeder, J. (2002). Robert Benne: Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities keep Faith with their Religious Traditions. *Intersections*, 13(9), 22–23.

Scott, J. (1990). *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Simuchimba, M. (2005). *Religion and Education in Zambia 1890–2000 and Beyond* [PhD Thesis]. University of South Africa.

Smart, N. (1969). *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Strauss, A., Corbin, J. M., & Corbin J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications.

Ter Haar, G. (2005). Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace? In G. ter Haar & J. J. Busutti (Eds.), *Bridge or Barrier: Religion. Violence and Visions for Peace* (pp. 3–34). Leiden: Brill.

Ter Haar, G., & Ellis, S. (2006). The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 18(3), 351–367. DOI: [10.1080/09578810600893403](https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810600893403)

Theron, P. M. (2013). The Impact of Christian Higher Education on the Lives of Students and Societies in Africa. *Koers*, 78(1), 1–8. DOI: [10.4102/koers.v78i1.60](https://doi.org/10.4102/koers.v78i1.60)

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.

Zambia Catholic University (ZCU). (2018). *Graduation Booklet*. ZCU: Kalulushi.

Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB). (2016). *Strategic Plan 2017–2026*. ZCCB: Lusaka. ZCCB archives.